JUDGE ME BY MY COVER

ISSUE 01

A ZINE
LITERATURE REVIEW

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This zine discusses topics on body dysmorphia and eating disorders. Some content may be distressing for readers.

Dear Diary,

My crush said that he liked my outfit today!! I'm glad I went shopping with my friends last week. Although it was weird when they kept saying how skinny I looked and that I should eat more?

But at dinner at grandma's today, auntie said I've gained weight. I do feel like I eat more now that I've joined the run club, so maybe I should watch how much I eat...

I came in first place at practice today again and coach says that if I keep up with it, I might be able to join a competition! I hope I can make it...

Mom also said that when I turn 15 I can get double eyelid surgery, so I can stop using the stickers ;) I can't wait for that, only two more years to go!!

WHAT IS BEAUTY SICKNESS

Beauty sick is a word coined by psychologist and researcher Renee Engeln.

Beauty sickness happens when women's bodies are evaluated with such relentless intensity that they start to feel like they're on display all the time (Engeln, 2017, p.7).

This makes it harder for them to see other aspects of their lives and takes away their mental energy, time, and money.

Symptoms of beauty sickness include body checking and self-objectification. Body checking occurs when one is constantly paying attention to and observing their own body and appearance (Mfa, 2020).

Sometimes, women can obsess over their beauty so much that it starts to twist their reality. Body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) is a type of mental illness that causes people to believe that they are defective or misshapen in their appearance (NHS, 2023). They may obsess over certain body parts so much that it hinders their ability to enjoy life.

Self-objectification is when one views themselves as an object rather than a person. When girls and women are conditioned that their appearance is always being paid attention to, the surveyed becomes the self-surveyor (Berger, 1972, p.46). She has to constantly be aware of how she is presented, how she appears to others, which is connected to the success of her life (Berger, 1972, p.46).

哇啊，你变瘦了！
Wow, you've gotten skinny!
没有啦，我肥了，快要减肥了。
No no, I've gained weight. I need to go on a diet soon.
美女，我每一次见到你，你越来越漂亮。
Hey pretty! Every time I see you, you've become more beautiful!
哎哟，没有啦，我老了，看我的皱纹...
Aiyo, no...I'm so old now, look at my wrinkles...

I am not completely free from beauty sickness myself. I have learned from a young age that when you are a woman, your body & attractiveness are your most important assets. I have also learnt how closely our bodies are paid attention to, through conversations my mother has with her friends.

Some parts of this conversation seen is called "fat talk" or "negative body talk" (Shannon and Mills, 2015). Although some parts of these conversations are intended to be positive, we can see that the other person may deny it by making negative comments about their own bodies.

Negative body talk may be used as a tool of connection with other women (Wolf, 1991, pg. 77), while sometimes it may be used to be the first to publicly criticize one's own body, as a defense against others who may have been thinking the same thing (Gapinski, Brownell, LaFrance, 2003).

(3)

BEAUTY CULTURE IN EAST ASIA

In this zine, I will be using the term “East Asia” to refer to Japan, China, and Korea. While I acknowledge the region includes other countries like Mongolia and Taiwan, this focus allows for a more in-depth analysis of the three nations’ beauty standards as well as cultural and societal trends.

The beauty business is booming in East Asia. In 2024, China's Beauty and Personal Care market is projected to generate a revenue of 70.37 billion USD (Statistica, 2024). Japan's Beauty Market size is valued at 45.2 billion USD and is expected to keep growing (Market Research Future, 2024).

While beauty standards vary among the three countries, there are a few features that stay consistent: Pale, smooth skin, thin/petite figure with a small face, and large eyes, as East Asians tend to prefer a more "sweet" and "cute" look.

Open up a beauty filter app like China's Meitu Pic (with over 450 million monthly users) and there are functions to smooth and slim the face, add makeup, and enlarge your eyes (Kwok, 2018).

Purikuras are Japanese photo booths that allow users to add stickers, graphic effects, and writing on top of their photos; it also edits the face to the extreme.

(4) Purikura automatically "enhances" the face

Beauty is so embedded into East Asian culture, that it is associated with goodness. “Yeppeu” means “pretty” in Korean, and it is frequently used as a synonym for “good” or “well-behaved” for girls and introduces this fusion of moral and aesthetic approval, as well as the value of beauty and the rewards it had in store (Zauner, 2021, pg. 38).

(6) *Raw image of a person*

(5) *a purikura machine that can usually be found in game centers and shopping malls*

Image of the same face after editing in "Meitu"

Historically in East Asia, white skin suggests "that one has led a labor-free life" (Hu, 2023, p.79). While East Asians don't typically bleach their skin, 90% of Korean women apply sunscreen all the time (Hu, 2023, p.77).

China's face-kinis have also gone viral on the internet, showing the ridiculous lengths people would go to prevent their skin from becoming tanned (Chappell, 2012).

(8)

East Asia also has impossibly strict standards for bodies. It is well-known that K-pop idols will undergo extreme diets to conform to industry standards and have had to endure body shaming from netizens. When K-pop idol IU was body shamed by Korean netizens, she went on a diet where she had an apple for breakfast, a sweet potato for lunch, and a protein shake for dinner while exercising excessively (Lee, 2018). She lost 4 kilograms in 4 days.

(9) *A hair removal ad in Tokyo public transport shows a woman passively lying with sharp hair protruding around her.*

The copy translates to "No matter how beautiful the person, (hair) grows back in 3 days"

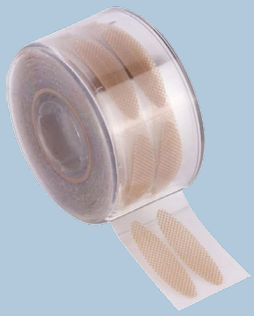
Japan's pharmacies stock "diet pills" or "over-eating pills"(DHC, 2024). Pills you can have when you feel like you have eaten or drank too much. Advertisements of "slimming centers" and hair removal can be found on the public transport system in Tokyo. In China, "Skinny Enough" challenges include extreme weight-loss diets and using various methods like the "A4 waist" challenge to show that one's waist is as thin as the width of an A4-sized sheet of paper (BBC, 2016).

(10)

In Asia, double eyelid surgery is the most commonly requested surgery. A monolid is when there are no visible eyelid creases above one's lash line, and 50% of Asians are born with monolids (Nguyen, Hsu and Dinh, 2009). While there are other ways to achieve the double eyelid such as "exercise tapes" that train eyelids to fold, many opt for the 30-minute double eyelid surgery (Dazed, 2019). Double eyelid surgeries cost about $2500-$7500 USD depending on the anesthetic and complexity of the surgery (Dazed, 2019).

Historically, the demand for this procedure has been linked to the desire to look more Western (Millard, 1964). Some also undergo a nose job for a smaller and higher Western-looking nose.

Micchi, a 9 year old Japanese girl, already had double eyelid surgery. In Japan, children are allowed to have plastic surgery with their parent's consent (Vice Asia, 2022).



Micchi's mother, Ruchhi, justifies her daughter's procedure "You can make memories of yourself being cute with double eyelids from an early age", and states that "not letting them have (plastic) surgery" was never an option. Ruchhi also hopes that Micchi will have nose and breast surgery in the future (Vice Asia, 2022).

1 out of 3 Korean women in their twenties have undergone some type of cosmetic procedure (Park, Myers and Langstein, 2019). Plastic surgeries are common gifts for Korean high school graduates (Stone, 2013).

Korean dermatology and plastic surgery apps offer discounts to recent high school grads of 50-70% on “three-pack” of the most popular plastic surgery for young Koreans–eyelids, nose jobs, and Botox for facial contouring (Hu, 2023, p.99).

A poll in South Korea found that nearly 40% of respondents experienced discrimination on their appearance when applying for jobs, and 60% of job resumes require a headshot, so passport photos are usually heavily retouched (Hu,2023, pp.96-97).

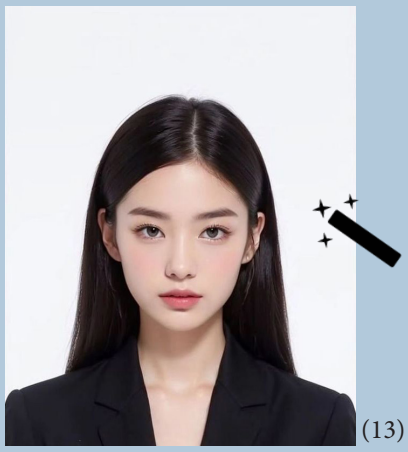
(11) *South Korea public space ads for plastic surgery*

Beauty routines should be a choice if one wants to participate or not, but that is usually not the case for young women in East Asia.

Japanese writer and activist Yumi Ishikawa was forced to wear high heels when she worked in a funeral parlour, which inspired her to create the campaign #KuToo (a play on Kutsu, which means shoes, and Kutsuu, meaning pain, inspired by the #MeToo movement) (JiJi, 2023).

The KuToo campaign demanded a ban on employers enforcing high heels as a part of workplace dress code.

However, Japan's Health and Labour minister Takumi Nemoto defends the mandatory high heel dress code in workplaces, stating that high heels are "socially accepted as something that falls within the realm of being occupationally necessary and appropriate."(BBC News, 2019).



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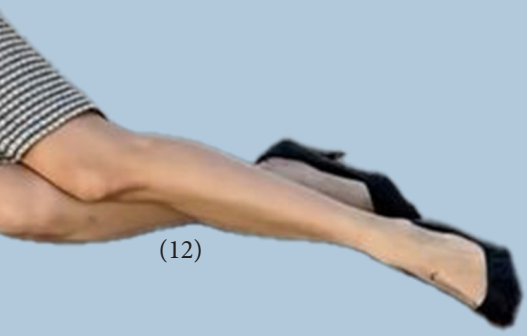
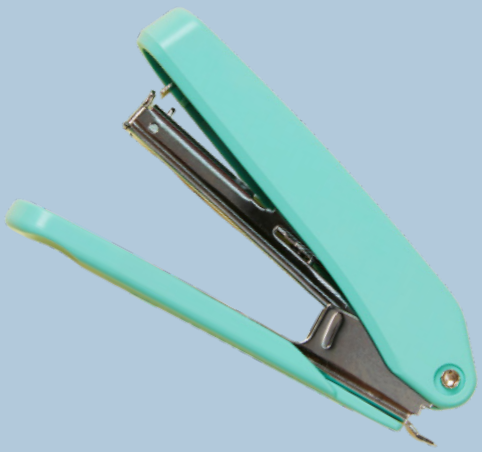

(12)

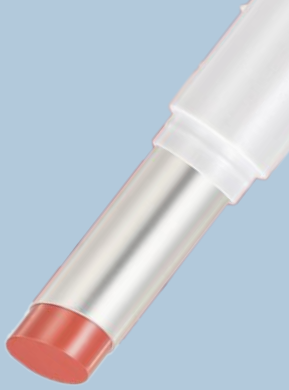
Dress codes are strict in Japan and even those with natural brown hair are made to dye their hair black to match everyone else in high school (BBC News, 2021).

Studies have found that East Asians prefer conformity, as it fosters group harmony and follows the collectivistic cultural tradition (Kim and Markus, 1999). There is a Japanese proverb "The nail that sticks out gets hammered down". It shows how deviancy in Japanese society is viewed.

Confucianism from China also has teachings of conformity. Confucius philosophy believed that everyone has defined roles and obligations and each person should understand and conform to one's own role to keep the peace and stability in a society (Berling, 1982).



While some may choose to have beauty routines and procedures for personal satisfaction, when plastic surgery becomes common and beauty standards influence job prospects, the unspoken expectations are raised for women in East Asian society. The desire to fit in with everyone and not stick out also makes women feel like they have to adhere to these strict and impossible standards.

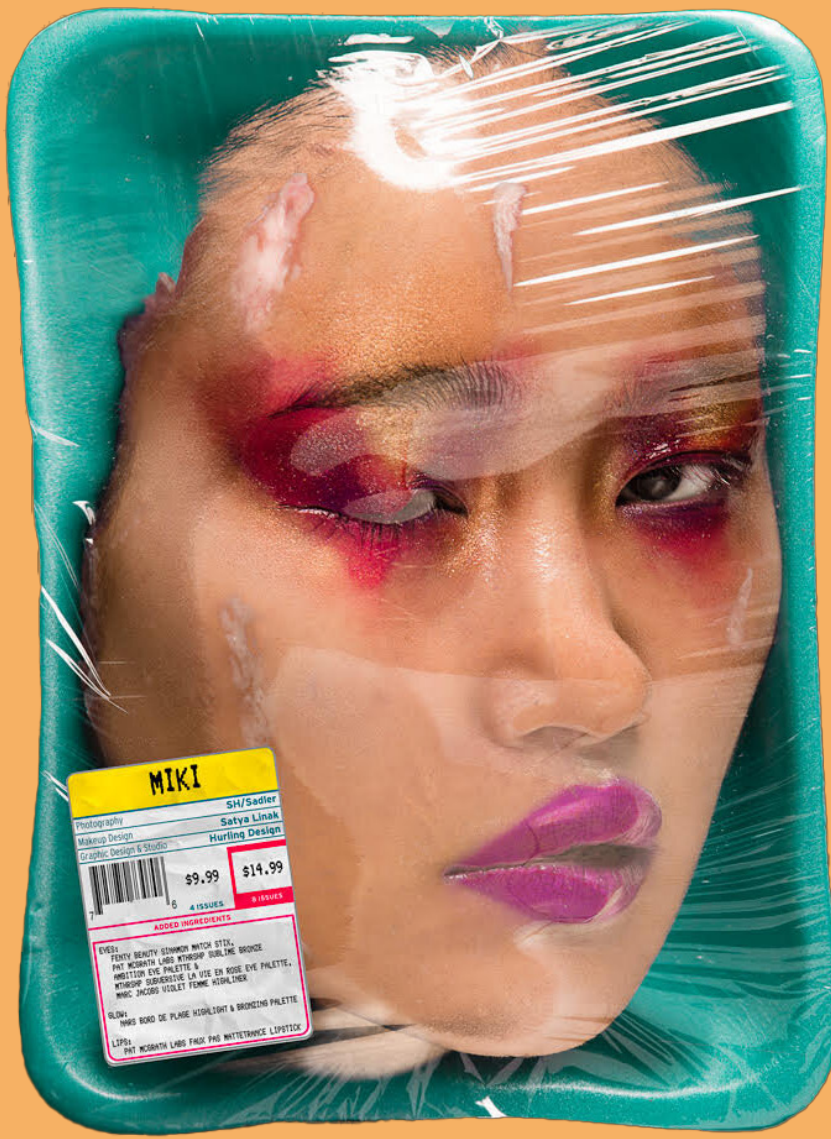


to do list

- ♡ hair appointment
- ♡ facial + lash extension
- ♡ nail appointment
- ♡ write cover letter
- ♡ buy work outfits
- ♡ practise interview

HOW BEAUTY SICKNESS AFFECTS WOMEN

"As women demanded access to power, the power structure used the beauty myth materially to undermine women's advancement" (Wolf, 1991, pg 20)



We may think that while beauty
often occupies the mind of women,
it is harmless and inconsequential,
it is just a part of women's routines.

(15)

However, research has shown that women who spend a lot of their mental energy monitoring their bodies also report lower levels of motivation and lower self-efficacy (Ruiz-Turrero et al., 2022).

When you spend more energy thinking about how you look, you have less mental space for other important things in your life.

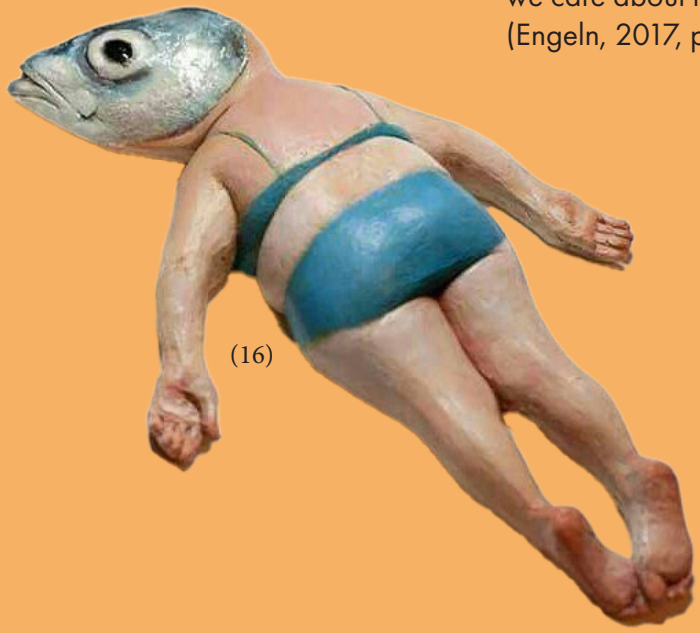
Labs would induce self-objectification by asking women to try on a bathing suit privately in a room with a mirror.

One research study found that just by doing that, women can experience shame about their bodies, which results in restrained eating and poorer performance on a subsequently administered math test compared to their male counterparts (Fredrickson, 1998).

This finding also suggests that performance in mathematics between sexes is not always a function of differential ability but could be caused by the competing demand for attention within the testing environment.

The results of self-objectification demonstrate the mental cost of raising girls in a culture that persistently objectifies the female body (Fredrickson, 1998).

For women and girls to stand up for what we care about, we need to reclaim that mental space for things we care about more than beauty (Engeln, 2017, p.87).



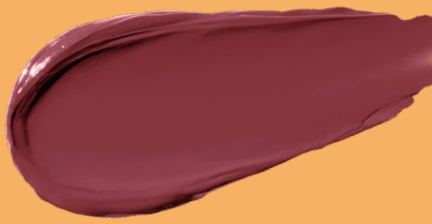
(16)

SUPER
VOLCANIC
PORE CLAY MASK
FACIAL MASK
Glasting
Melting Balm
PERFECTION
LUMIÈRE
TEINT FLUIDE
PERFECTION HAUTE TENUE
LONG-WEAR
FLAWLESS FLUID MAKEUP
SPF 10
Lip Scrub
VITAMIN C
SERUM
ANTI-WRINKLE CONCENTRATE
RENOVATING ANTIOXIDANT
PURE VITAMIN C 10%
HELIOSENSINE SALICYLIC ACID
WITH LA ROCHE-POSAY
THERMAL SPRING WATER
miu miu

Anti Aging
TROUBLE CLEANSING FOAM
CLEANSE + TROUBLE CARE
Clear Oil Control Film
Clearing Solution
DERMASK
ULTRA-FINE MICROFIBER SHEET
CONCEALER

East Asian women make less than their male counterparts. Korea and Japan have the greatest disparity in gender wage gap in the OECD countries (OECD, 2022). Korean women only make 69% of what Korean men do, and Japanese women make 75% of Japanese men (OECD, 2022). The gender wage gap in China is actually increasing, jumping from 57th place to106th in 2020 in the World Economic Forum "Global Gender Gap Report" (Li, Tang and Jin, 2024).

East Asian women make less money, but have to pay more taxes. This unofficial tax is called the makeup tax. Women have to invest time and money into their looks as it impacts their relationships and work, especially those that are public-facing jobs.



Women spend an average of 55 minutes every day working on their appearance and professional women are devoting one-third of their income to "beauty maintenance" and considering it a necessary investment (Wolf, 1991, p.52).

One 32 year old woman reports that she spends $15,000 out of her $60,000 income on "self preservation" (Wolf, 1991, pp.52-52).

Women also have to take out more time of their days to spend on beauty routines. The 10-step Korean skincare routine (Balagam, 2024) consists of applying 10 different products on your face in the morning and evening to achieve the "perfect" skin, and this is before you put on makeup!

Women from the ages 18-29 are more likely than anyone else to spend more than one hour getting ready in the morning (Palmer, 2012). Combined, that makes up two full weeks per year.

Plastic surgery may be a fix to some physical insecurities, but is it worth risking your life for the sake of appearance?

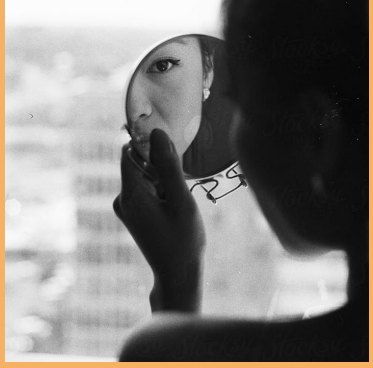
(18)

Even minor plastic surgeries can have dangerous consequences. In 2024, 22 women between the age of 25-59 had a bad reaction to Botox, an injection commonly used to shape the face or smooth wrinkles (Fox-Skelly, 2024).

When Botox spreads beyond where it is injected, it can cause muscle paralysis, difficulty breathing, and even death.

In China, only 13,000 plastic surgery institutions are qualified, and there are 80,000 "black clinics" performing possibly unsafe plastic surgery (Jianna, 2022). Because of malpractice in plastic surgery clinics, some patients' attempt at beautifying themselves have resulted in death (Yang, 2024; Jianna, 2022).

Sometimes body dysmorphia or societal pressures can lead girls to start eating in a disorganized pattern. Anorexia nervosa is an eating disorder where one restricts their diet or starves themselves (NHS, 2024). Sometimes anorexia can lead a person to lose so much weight that they may starve to death. Other health risks of anorexia include weakened immune system, memory issues, hair loss, and fertility problems (NHS, 2024).



(19)

Bulimia is an eating disorder where one may binge and then purge the food they eat (NHS, 2024). Sometimes bulimic people may restrict their food intake for a long time, then eat a large amount of food in a short period of time, and try to get rid of it by vomiting, with laxatives, or excessive exercise.

The health risks of bulimia include feeling weak all the time, damaged teeth, low bone density, and epileptic seizures (NHS, 2024).

If you or someone you know is struggling with an eating disorder, reach out to someone you trust about the issue.

Scan QR code for resources and help with eating disorders.

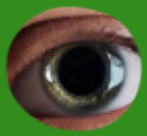
choose

HOW TO COMBAT BEAUTY SICKNESS

"...the women who gained their power from beauty were indebted to the men whose desire granted them that power in the first place." (Ratajkowski, My Body, 2021, p. 47)

average

In 2015, Dove had a campaign called "Choose Beautiful", where they put up two different entrances to buildings, one labeled "Beautiful" and one labeled as "Average" (Inside Edition, 2015).



beautiful

The ad started out with women sadly going through the door that says "Average", but then later a woman walks confidently into the "Beautiful" door, and other women follow along. Women are going about their day when they suddenly are confronted with the message and instruction to evaluate how they look.

now

average

While the ad is supposed to be a positive message about how women should view themselves, it also implies that every woman should think that they're beautiful, and that there's something wrong or lacking in a woman who thinks they look "Average". To say that a woman can just "choose" beautiful ignores the fact that the cultural beauty standards still exist.

Women don't need reminders that their appearance is being evaluated. Many may think that by paying a compliment to a woman's appearance, it can help her feel better about how she looks, but the result is typically the opposite. Even when it is positive, bringing attention to a woman's body can result in body shame.

now

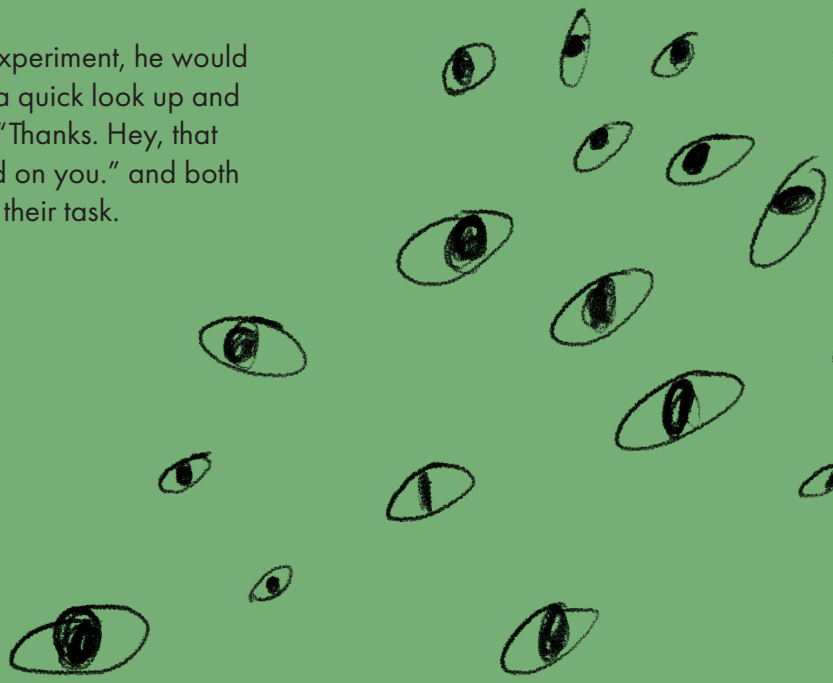
In an experiment, men were recruited to pretend to be a research participant (Tiggemann and Boundy 2008). The man is placed in a room with the real research participant, who is a woman. The woman and man in the experiment were given a simple task such as a word search, and the experimenter would leave the room.

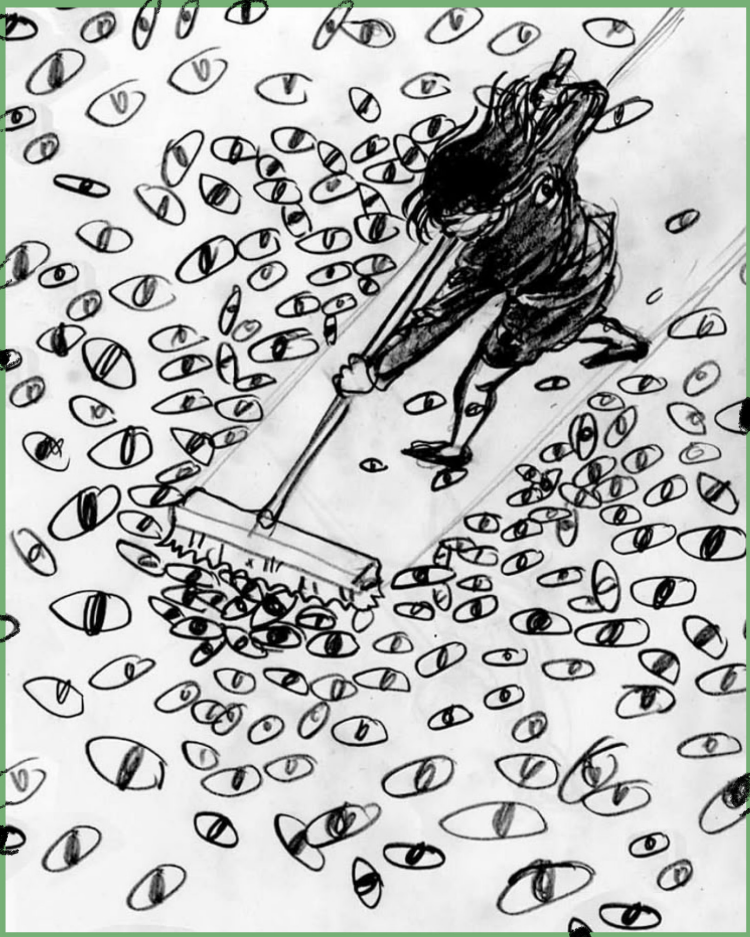
The fake participant would "accidentally" drop his pencil and the real participant would usually pick it up for him. Here is where the variable would change. In the first experiment, he would say "Thanks, you're nice.".

In the second experiment, he would smile, give her a quick look up and down and say "Thanks. Hey, that shirt looks good on you." and both would return to their task.

Afterwards, the women participants would complete a "personality measure of the experiment", where one of the measures tested was on self-objectification and the other measure was on appearance and self-esteem.

The women who got complimented on their looks reported higher self-objectification and also felt that they looked worse (Tiggemann and Boundy 2008).





Paradoxically, getting checked out and complimented can make women self-objectify and leave them feeling less attractive. A different study found that when women participants knew that they would be interacting with a male participant as part of a study, it was enough to increase body shame (Calogero, 2004).

We don't need to talk about beauty in a different way, we need to talk about it less.

It is statistically impossible for everyone to look above average, but that doesn't matter when beauty isn't linked to a person's value.

Beauty standards may never go away, but we can heal from our own beauty sickness.

We can change the lens through which we view the world and be conscious about how we speak about certain topics like food, weight, and appearance.

"A woman wins by giving herself and other women permission–to eat; to be sexual; to age; to wear overalls ...to do whatever we choose in following–or ignoring–our own aesthetic." (Wolf, 1991, pg. 290).

We can choose to wear unrestrictive clothes that make us feel comfortable in our own skin.

We can focus our energy less on how we look and more on what we are passionate about.

Dear Body,

Thank you for giving me the ability to accomplish the things I wanted to do in life and allowing me to continue to do the things I care about every day.

Thank you legs, for giving me strength to hike up mountains and walk to school, my arms for letting me carry my groceries home, my hands for letting me draw and write and cook.

Thank you eyes, for letting me look at sunsets and read stories, and ears for allowing me to listen to so many beautiful pieces of music.

Thank you skin, for letting me feel the warmth of the sun and the hugs of those who love me.

I'm sorry for the times I told you that you weren't enough and judged you so harshly in the past. You were the one who experienced all the joys and hardship of life with me, so I promise to take good care of you, and appreciate you for everything you do for me.

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